

Preparing Our Nation's First Responders

One year after the formation of the Department of Homeland Security, and more than two years after September 11, America's first responders are still not properly equipped, trained, or staffed to protect our communities from a terrorist attack. In certain respects, we have not even taken the first steps towards reaching an acceptable level of preparedness, because there has been no systematic review of the true planning, equipment, training and personnel needs of America's first responders. While the Administration continues to propose multiple, disparate sources of funding for emergency responders, it has not defined the goals and objectives of this spending, nor has it identified the priority threats and vulnerabilities that limited homeland security funds should address. Most of our first responders still do not have interoperable communications equipment, and the Administration has not taken bold steps to resolve this critical deficiency. In the opinion of an independent task force chaired by former Senator Warren Rudman, "the United States remains dangerously ill-prepared to handle a catastrophic attack on American soil." The Select Committee on Homeland Security has crafted bipartisan legislation to determine the needs of all our communities and to create a single first responder grant program that will get the best equipment and training in the hands of the police, firefighters and emergency personnel who will be the first on the scene of an attack.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, there was a broad recognition among policymakers and lawmakers that the preparedness and response capabilities of our first responders – police, firefighters, emergency medical service, public health agencies and hospitals, public works agencies, and emergency management agencies – needed to be significantly strengthened to meet the threat of terrorism in the homeland. Overall, fire departments across the country have only enough radios to equip half the firefighters on a shift, and breathing apparatuses for only one third.¹ Police departments in cities nationwide do not have the protective gear to safely secure a site following an attack with weapons of mass destruction, and most cities do not have the necessary equipment to determine what kind of hazardous materials emergency responders may be facing.² All terrorist incidents are local or at least will start that way. Effective preparedness, response, and recovery can only be achieved with the recognition that local responders are the first line of defense, and that these responders must have the resources to fulfill their critical roles in the fight against terrorism.³

¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency, United States Fire Administration, *A Needs Assessment of the U.S. Fire Service, FA-240* (Washington: Federal Emergency Management Agency, December 2002), vi.

² Council on Foreign Relations, *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, Emergency Responders: Drastically Underfunded, Dangerously Unprepared* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, June 2003), 1.

³ Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Fourth Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Arlington, VA: RAND, December 2002), 27-28.

SECURITY GAP: Preparedness Needs Have Not Been Defined.

All levels of government have recognized the critical need to bridge the “security gap” by providing additional funding for first responder planning, training, exercises, and equipment nationwide. In FY 2004, it is estimated that the Federal government will spend approximately \$5.4 billion⁴ on these efforts, while State and local governments will spend between \$5.2 and \$15.2 billion.⁵ However, one year after the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), these funding levels are completely arbitrary because the Administration has yet to conduct a systematic review of the actual needs of the first responder community. While the Administration requests and Congress continues to provide funding for emergency responders, we have not defined the goals and objectives of this spending, nor have we identified the threats and vulnerabilities that will be mitigated by additional homeland security funds. Therefore, we do not know if the current funding levels are sufficient to close the “security gap” facing our communities, and we have no way to measure progress towards the goal of providing communities with the ability to respond to a catastrophic act of terrorism.

Numerous observers from across the political spectrum – including the DHS Office of the Inspector General – have repeated the critical need for such measures of progress:

“DHS program managers have yet to develop meaningful performance measures necessary to determine whether the grant programs have actually enhanced state and local capabilities to respond to terrorist attacks and natural disasters.”⁶

“This lack of broad but measurable objectives is unsustainable. It deprives policymakers of the information they need to make rational resource allocations, and renders program managers unable to measure genuine progress. It also suggests endlessly escalating program expenditures, since there is no logical end point to a process whose only goal is to improve from current standing.”⁷

⁴ (a) “Fiscal Year 2004 Homeland Security Appropriations Act,” (P.L. 108-90), *United States Statutes at Large*. 117 Stat. 1137; (b) U.S. House, 108th Congress, 1st Session. *H.R. 2673, Fiscal Year 2004 Consolidated Appropriations Act*, ONLINE, GPO Access, Available:

<http://www.congress.gov/omni2004/H25NO032.PDF> [January 7, 2004]; (c) Council on Foreign Relations, *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, Emergency Responders: Drastically Underfunded, Dangerously Unprepared* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, June 2003), 29-30.

⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, Emergency Responders: Drastically Underfunded, Dangerously Unprepared* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, June 2003), 29-30.

⁶ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General, *Major Management Challenges Facing the Department of Homeland Security*, ONLINE, December 31, 2003, Department of Homeland Security, <http://www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/FY04managementchallenges.pdf> [February 10, 2004].

⁷ Richard A. Falkenrath, “The Problems of Preparedness: Challenges Facing the U.S. Domestic Preparedness Program,” *Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness Discussion Paper, ESDP-2000-05* (December 2000), 15, http://bcsia.ksg.harvard.edu/BCSIA_content/documents/The_Problems_of_Preparedness.pdf [February 18, 2004].

“... without a comprehensive approach to measuring how well we are doing with the resources being applied at any point in time, there will be very little prospect for answering the question ‘How well prepared are we?’”⁸

“But if the nation’s plan for enhancing security is to become a reality, the government will need to determine if, in fact, the tens of billions of dollars in fact produce greater security—and if all American citizens can count on at least a minimum level of security in their travel, homes, and places of business.”⁹

This situation persists because DHS has not defined national standards of preparedness – the essential capabilities to which every jurisdiction of a particular size should have or have immediate access. It is, therefore, not yet possible to determine precisely the gaps in each jurisdiction between how prepared it is now and how prepared it needs to be. Without such standards and guidelines, such as technical specifications for equipment and minimum training standards, both state and local governments and first responders lack sufficient information to determine their preparedness needs and priorities, as well as the true costs of their needs. National capability standards would make it possible to use funding efficiently to meet identified needs and measure preparedness levels on a local, state, regional, and national scale. Under the current DHS system, however, states are annually allocated an arbitrary amount of funds without any guidance as to how these funds should be further allocated to meet national preparedness goals.

In a July, 2003, hearing before the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney testified that in order to determine the degree of risk and the necessary levels of protection within his state, the DHS should provide guidelines, templates, and best practices from other states. These types of tools would allow him to answer questions such as, “What is the appropriate level? What is the level which is being practiced in other states? What is the best practice?”¹⁰

The GAO has recommended that, given the need for an integrated approach to homeland security, national performance goals and measures might best be developed in a collaborative way, involving all levels of government and the private sector.¹¹ GAO further reported,

“The establishment of specific national goals and measures for homeland security initiatives, including preparedness, will not only go a long way towards assisting state and local entities in determining successes and areas where improvement is needed, but could also be used as goals and performance measures as a basis for assessing the effectiveness of federal programs. [...] Given the recent and proposed increases in homeland security funding, as well as the need for real and meaningful improvements in

⁸ Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Fourth Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Arlington, VA: RAND, December 2002), 37.

⁹ Donald F. Kettl, “Promoting State and Local Government Performance for Homeland Security,” *The Century Foundation Homeland Security Project* (June 1, 2002), 1, http://www.homelandsec.org/Pub_category/pdf/state_local_gov_perform.pdf [February 18, 2004].

¹⁰ U.S. House, Select Committee on Homeland Security, *First Responders: How States, Localities, and the Federal Government are Working Together to Make America Safer* Hearing, July 17, 2003.

¹¹ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Homeland Security: Effective Intergovernmental Coordination Is Key to Success*, GAO-02-1011T (Washington: U.S. General Accounting Office, August 2002), 13.

preparedness, establishing clear goals and performance measures is critical to ensuring both a successful and fiscally responsible effort.”¹²

The current first responder funding process, however, is irrational; neither DHS nor the grant recipients have a “preparedness baseline” to measure the nation’s progress towards enhanced preparedness for response to acts of terrorism. The annual distribution of funding for planning, equipment, training, and exercises from DHS’s first responder grant system is arbitrary and based on political and budgetary considerations, rather than a rational assessment of needs in light of the terrorist threats and critical infrastructure vulnerabilities facing our communities.

State allocations for the first fiscal year 2004 homeland security grants announced by the DHS Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP) continue to reflect the lack of any true assessment of the threats and vulnerabilities facing our nation.¹³ Under the current distribution formula, each state receives 0.75 percent of the total grants available in each fiscal year. The rest of the money is distributed based on population.¹⁴ Based on this formula, states such as California, New York, Texas and Florida receive less than \$6 per capita, while low-population states such as Wyoming, North Dakota and Vermont receive more than five times as much per person.¹⁵ Federal homeland security spending of \$38 per capita in Wyoming and less than \$6 per capita in Texas and California certainly do not reflect the threats and vulnerabilities likely facing those states.

For fiscal year 2005, the President’s budget request for grants to our state and local first responders increases the level of discretionary grant funds that will be distributed to states and localities based on threats and vulnerabilities identified by DHS. At the same time, however, the fiscal year 2005 request represents close to an \$800 million – or 18 percent – decrease from the amounts appropriated by Congress in fiscal year 2004.¹⁶ Yet, DHS has not conducted any published studies or developed any metrics to confirm how much states and localities have improved their preparedness for acts of terrorism, and therefore can provide no rationale for the overall reduction in first responder grant funds.¹⁷

In a hearing before the House Select Committee on Homeland Security (Select Committee), Los Angeles County Police Captain Michael Grossman recommended the formation of a “first responder/emergency manager” task force to serve as a federal advisory group to ensure effective distribution of grant funds.¹⁸ In September 2003, Democratic members of the Select Committee introduced the PREPARE Act (H.R. 3158), which would require DHS to create an independent, expert state and local task force comprised of representatives from first responder communities as

¹² Ibid, 15.

¹³ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Remarks by Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge Announcing FY04 ODP Grant Allocations*, ONLINE, November 3, 2003, Department of Homeland Security, Available: <http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=2174> [January 7, 2004].

¹⁴ “USA Patriot Act of 2001.” (P.L. 107-56, § 1014(c)(3)), *United States Statutes at Large*, 115 Stat. 272.

¹⁵ Alice Lipowicz, “Cox Says Administration Unwilling to Change Formula for Homeland Security Grants,” *CQ Homeland Security*, November 3, 2003, <http://homeland.cq.com/hs/news.do> [February 18, 2004].

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Budget in Brief, Fiscal Year 2005*, (Washington: Department of Homeland Security, February 2004), 57.

¹⁷ Justin Rood, “CNA Snags \$7.4 Million Deal to Help DHS Assess State and Local Preparedness,” *CQ Homeland Security*, February 17, 2003, <http://homeland.cq.com/hs/news.do> [February 19, 2004].

¹⁸ U.S. House, Select Committee on Homeland Security, *First Responders: How States, Localities, and the Federal Government are Working Together to Make America Safer* Hearing, July 17, 2003.

well as other experts.¹⁹ This task force would develop standards and guidelines for states and localities to use to identify the essential terrorism prevention, preparedness, and response capabilities required by any generic community of a given population and geographic size, utilizing threat and vulnerability information to guide the determination of such capabilities. The Select Committee's Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness and Response included the PREPARE Act's requirement for this task force, in addition to numerous other PREPARE Act provisions, in bipartisan first responder grant legislation that was unanimously approved on November 20, 2003.²⁰

As stipulated in the bipartisan legislation, the task force would specify capability needs – including equipment, personnel, training, planning, and exercises – for firefighting, law enforcement, emergency medical services, public health systems, hospitals, and emergency management, that are flexible enough to be used for a wide range of threats and vulnerabilities. These capabilities can be developed and maintained within the community, as part of a regional agreement among communities, or at the state government level. In this fashion, annual grant funding from the DHS will be better budgeted and targeted to meet the needs assessed by the states and localities, allowing us to measure progress towards closing the “security gap.”

SECURITY RECOMMENDATION

Congress should promptly enact this bipartisan legislation and the President should sign it into law. Annual allocations of grant funding no longer will be based on irrational formulas; state and local capability needs – and the grant funds provided by DHS – will vary based on the real threats and vulnerabilities faced by each state and local community, leading to a more rational allocation of available resources.

Passage of the Select Committee's bipartisan legislation would address the frequently-voiced need for additional investments to build state and local preparedness capabilities. Independent analyses have noted that homeland security spending over the next five fiscal years (FY 2004 – FY 2008) would need to be tripled to meet the preparedness needs of our first responders.²¹ Mayors in the nation's largest cities continue to advocate higher levels of funding for training and prevention activities associated with increased threats, in addition to requesting an expansion of the allowable uses of current funds so that these mayors can address their top security priorities.²²

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¹⁹ U.S. House, 108th Congress, 1st Session. *H.R. 3158, Preparing America to Respond Effectively Act of 2003*, ONLINE, GPO Access, Available: http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=108_cong_bills&docid=f:h3158ih.txt.pdf [January 28, 2004].

²⁰ U.S. House, Select Committee on Homeland Security, *Faster and Smarter Funding for First Responders Act of 2003* Markup, November 20, 2003.

²¹ Council on Foreign Relations, *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, Emergency Responders: Drastically Underfunded, Dangerously Unprepared* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, June 2003), 2.

²² (a) U.S. House, Select Committee on Homeland Security, *H.R. 3266: Faster and Smarter Funding for First Responders Act of 2003* Hearing, October 16, 2003; (b) U.S. Conference of Mayors, “90 Percent of Cities Left Empty-Handed Without Funds from Largest Federal Homeland Security Program: Cities First To Respond, Last In Line For Funding Reveals First-Ever, 50-State Analysis,” September 17, 2003, http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/news/press_releases/documents/homelandfunding_091703.pdf [February 18, 2004].

By defining—for the first time—the preparedness needs of our communities, this legislation would provide an appropriate, sustained level of investment in preparedness for our first responders.

SECURITY GAP: Administration’s Preparedness Goal Requires Legislation.

On December 17, 2003, in apparent recognition of the serious shortcomings in first responder preparedness grant programs, the White House issued Homeland Security Presidential Directive Number 8 (HSPD-8) on National Preparedness.²³ Similar to the PREPARE Act and the Select Committee’s legislation, this directive requires DHS to define a national preparedness goal, to provide grant funding in support of achieving this preparedness goal based on a true assessment of the risks faced by grant applicants, and to define standards for first responder equipment.

SECURITY RECOMMENDATION

To truly advance the goals set forth in HSPD-8, the Administration should support prompt enactment of the Select Committee’s legislation. Enactment of the Select Committee’s legislation would revise the grant systems to meet the Administration’s goal of allocating funds based on risk.

SECURITY GAP: Existing Grant Programs are Not Effective.

Not only are the current DHS terrorism preparedness grant programs unrelated to a valid assessment of overall needs and required capabilities, these programs are also confusing, duplicative, inefficient, and mired in bureaucracy. In November 2002, GAO reported to Congress on the development of counter-terrorism programs for state and local governments that were similar and potentially duplicative.²⁴ Later, in April 2003, GAO testified that they had identified at least 16 different grant programs that were being used by the nation’s first responders to address the nation’s homeland security needs, including both terrorism-specific grant programs as well as “all-hazards” grant programs. GAO stated that multiple fragmented grant programs such as these can create a confusing and administratively burdensome process for state and local officials seeking to use federal resources for their pressing homeland security needs.²⁵

Mayors in the nations’ largest cities have repeatedly voiced their frustrations with the homeland security grant process. Mayor James A. Garner testified before the Select Committee’s Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness and Response that an October 2003 survey conducted

²³ The White House, *Homeland Security Presidential Directive/HSPD-8*, ONLINE, December 17, 2003. The White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/12/20031217-6.html> [January 7, 2004].

²⁴ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Combating Terrorism: Funding Data Reported to Congress Should Be Improved*, GAO-03-170 (Washington: U.S. General Accounting Office, November 26, 2002).

²⁵ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Federal Assistance: Grant System Continues to be Highly Fragmented*, GAO-03-718T (Washington: U.S. General Accounting Office, April 29, 2003), 8.

by the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM) found that more than half of the 168 cities surveyed had either not been consulted or had no opportunity to influence state decision-making about how to use and distribute fiscal year 2003 homeland security grant funds. The survey also found that 80 to 90 percent of cities had not received funds from the largest DHS homeland security grant program in fiscal year 2003, ODP's state homeland security grant program.²⁶ A January 2004 follow-up survey by the USCM revealed that 76 percent of cities still had not received any fiscal year 2003 funds from the state homeland security grant program.²⁷

The fragmented delivery of federal assistance complicates coordination and integration of services and planning at state and local levels. Homeland security is a complex mission requiring the coordinated participation of many federal, state, and local government entities as well as the private sector. Preparing the nation to address the new threats from terrorism requires partnerships across many disparate actors at many levels in our intergovernmental system. For example, local governments have started to assess how to restructure relationships among contiguous local entities in order to take advantage of economies of scale, promote resource sharing, and improve coordination on a regional basis. The complex web of federal grants described by GAO suggests that by allocating federal aid to different players at the state and local level, federal grant programs may continue to reinforce state and local fragmentation.²⁸

Currently, there are multiple preparedness funding streams, each with different rules, formulas, and customers. In DHS press releases, these programs often are cited jointly and combined into overall "First Responder" funding to demonstrate responsiveness to the needs of the emergency preparedness community.²⁹ However, as noted by GAO, the overlap and fragmentation among these programs have fostered inefficiencies and numerous concerns among first responders. State and local officials have repeatedly voiced frustration and confusion about the burdensome and inconsistent application processes among programs.³⁰

SECURITY RECOMMENDATION

As originally proposed in the PREPARE Act, the Select Committee's bipartisan legislation would combine multiple DHS first responder preparedness grants into a single "First Responder Grant Program." This new program would distribute grants to states and localities to achieve preparedness capability needs based on the current threats and vulnerabilities they face. The grant program will be administered by one office within DHS, in order to establish a single

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²⁶ U.S. House, Select Committee on Homeland Security, *H.R. 3266: Faster and Smarter Funding for First Responders Act of 2003* Hearing, 16 October 2003.

²⁷ U.S. Conference of Mayors, "Mayors Release New Homeland Security Survey at 72nd Winter Meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors: Second Mayors' Report to the Nation Shows Money Still Log-Jammed at State Level," January 22, 2004, http://usmayors.org/72ndWinterMeeting/homelandreportrelease_012204.pdf [February 18, 2004].

²⁸ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Federal Assistance: Grant System Continues to be Highly Fragmented*, GAO-03-718T (Washington: U.S. General Accounting Office, April 29, 2003), 13.

²⁹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Helping Our Nation's First Responders," ONLINE. June 5, 2003, Department of Homeland Security, <http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=910> [January 7, 2004].

³⁰ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Federal Assistance: Grant System Continues to be Highly Fragmented*, GAO-03-718T (Washington: U.S. General Accounting Office, April 29, 2003), 14.

organizational entity that is responsible for maintaining all information on the grants and regular communication with all grant recipients.

The legislation also includes specific provisions to ensure that local governments receive federal homeland security grant funds no later than 45 days after the state government receives such funds, including allowing communities to request direct payment of grant funds from DHS if the state fails to pass through grant money in the required timeframe. Finally, to encourage cooperation across city, county, and state boundaries, and to speed the distribution and use of grant funds, the legislation allows intra- and inter-state regions to apply directly to DHS for homeland security grant funds. This regional concept was first developed in legislation introduced by Representative Christopher Cox (R – CA), Chairman of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security (H.R. 3266).

SECURITY GAP: First Responders Still Cannot Communicate.

Perhaps the most critical need of our emergency response community is a significant enhancement of their ability to communicate during times of crisis. Today, new and evolving technologies can bring news and entertainment to the farthest reaches of the world. At the same time, many law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency medical service personnel working in the same jurisdiction cannot communicate with one another at the scene of an emergency. The inability of our public safety officials to readily communicate with one another threatens the public's safety and often results in unnecessary loss of lives and property.³¹

However, DHS and other federal agencies are not moving quickly and efficiently to address the interoperable communications needs of first responders. There are at least six federal departments and a number of interagency and independent organizations that are involved in developing standards for communication systems and equipment.³² This situation makes it difficult for states and local entities to know what to buy, and increases the possibility of purchasing incompatible equipment. Further, despite the fact that the Homeland Security Act of 2002 mandated that no less than four organizations within DHS – including the Office of the Secretary – address and administer the implementation of interoperable communications systems,³³ only one state and local grant program to address this critical issue has been implemented in the year since DHS was established.

In fiscal year 2003, DHS, in coordination with the Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), awarded a total of \$146.5 million in grants for local jurisdictions across the nation to conduct demonstration projects that will explore uses of equipment and technologies to increase communications interoperability. However, in a hearing before the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, Michael Brown, DHS Undersecretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response, indicated that it will take approximately six months

³¹ National Task Force on Interoperability, *Why Can't We Talk? Working Together To Bridge the Communications Gap to Save Lives: A Guide for Public Officials* (Washington: National Task Force on Interoperability, February 2003), 2.

³² Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Fifth Annual Report to the President and Congress*, (Arlington, VA: RAND, December 15, 2003), 26.

³³ "Homeland Security Act of 2002," (P.L. 107-296, § 102(c)(2), 232(b)(7), 430(c)(2), and 502(7)), *United States Statutes at Large*, 116 Stat. 2143, 2159, 2191, and 2212.

to more than a year to complete these projects, to be followed by a DHS study and the development of national standards.³⁴

In addition, the Administration's fiscal year 2004 budget request did not include any specific funds for State and local governments to enhance or implement interoperable communications systems. The only fiscal year 2004 funds for this purpose – \$85 million – were provided by Congress under the Department of Justice COPS program, representing a \$61.5 million, or 42 percent, reduction from fiscal year 2003 program levels. For fiscal year 2005, the Administration's budget requests no funds for interoperable communications grants for state and local governments. Given the fact that DHS has requested no funding for enhancing state and local interoperable communications in fiscal year 2005, first responders continue to be concerned that the Federal efforts in this area are fragmented and uncoordinated.³⁵

At present, the only continuing DHS effort to address interoperable communications resides in the Wireless Public Safety Interoperable Communications Program (SAFECOM) office within the Science and Technology Directorate. Established by OMB, SAFECOM serves as the umbrella program within the federal government to assist federal, state, and local public safety agencies improve response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. DHS serves as the "managing partner" for SAFECOM, with eight other federal agencies contributing resources to the effort. For fiscal year 2005, DHS and the other federal agencies are requesting a total of \$22.1 million for SAFECOM to create a process for developing interoperability standards, to coordinate federal grant guidance, to provide training and technical assistance, and to perform research and development on emerging interoperable communications technologies.³⁶

However, SAFECOM officials recently have noted that no standard, guidance, or national strategy exists on interoperability. Justice Department officials informed GAO that they are working with SAFECOM to develop a statement of requirements for interoperability that should be ready for release by May 1, 2004.³⁷ In other words, more than two years and eight months after the loss of New York City first responders due to the non-interoperability of their communications systems, the Administration intends to issue a statement describing the need for interoperability standards.

On February 23, 2004, Secretary Ridge announced that improving interoperable communications and equipment was the department's second highest priority.³⁸ However, DHS's proposed solution of providing "technical specifications" for short-term, baseline communications is nothing new. Many state and local government officials have already identified and deployed

³⁴ U.S. House, Select Committee on Homeland Security, *Response to Terrorism: How is DHS Improving Our Capabilities* Hearing, June 19, 2003.

³⁵ Alice Lipowicz, "Police Get \$85 Million to Pursue Interoperability," *CQ Homeland Security*, December 3, 2003, <http://homeland.cq.com/hs/news.do> [February 18, 2004].

³⁶ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Fiscal Year 2005 Congressional Budget Justification* (Washington: Department of Homeland Security, February 2, 2004), 30-31.

³⁷ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Homeland Security: Challenges in Achieving Interoperable Communications for First Responders*, GAO-04-231T (Washington: U.S. General Accounting Office, November 6, 2003), 8.

³⁸ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Fact Sheet: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Preserving Our Freedoms, Protecting Our Nation," ONLINE, February 23, 2004, Department of Homeland Security, <http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=3208> [February 24, 2004].

such systems, but lack the resources to further enhance interoperable communications within their jurisdictions.

SECURITY RECOMMENDATION

While the Administration continues to conduct studies and wait for the development of nationwide standards before providing significant funding for interoperable communications systems, there are a number of interim solutions that can be implemented in the short term to improve communications interoperability for our first responders. Various technologies are available to “patch” or connect different radio frequencies. The simplest form of patching is installing a radio that can access another system in the dispatch center and making an audio connection with wiring. A more technologically advanced system is also available that can connect each attached radio through a switching system.³⁹ Further, a number of federal government contractors already have developed and deployed mobile emergency operations centers that include multiple communications capabilities to facilitate interoperability during emergency response. The Administration should immediately implement these interim solutions by providing dedicated, annual funding for enhancements to state and local interoperable communications systems in order to address this critical need of our first responders.

The Administration should also address the disjointed federal approach to interoperability by clearly assigning principal responsibility for communications interoperability standards to the DHS Project SAFECOM Office, and by providing this office with the annual funding it requires to develop and rapidly implement standards for interoperable communications equipment.

The Select Committee’s bipartisan legislation, H.R. 3266, addresses each of these issues. The Administration should support and sign into law this legislation in order to provide our first responders with rapid access to and regular, annual funding for technologies that facilitate interoperable communications; to move more quickly to develop standards for interoperable communications systems; and to coordinate all federal programs in support of interoperable communications within DHS.

SECURITY GAP: Civil Preparedness Must Be Improved.

In addition to preparing our emergency response community, it is imperative that citizens of the United States be informed of terrorist incidents, and understand what actions to take in the face of a terrorist attack or threatened terrorist attack. As the authors of the Progressive Policy Institute Homeland Security Report Card state, “this preparedness is key to reducing panic and saving lives.”⁴⁰ Efforts to address civil preparedness and public notification of terrorist incidents by DHS and the Administration through the Ready.gov website are lacking in detail and are sometimes contradictory. Few individual Americans – at home, at work, and in schools – understand what they should do or whom to turn to for guidance in the event of a terrorist attack.

³⁹ National Task Force on Interoperability, *Why Can’t We Talk? Working Together To Bridge the Communications Gap to Save Lives: A Guide for Public Officials* (Washington: National Task Force on Interoperability, February 2003), 30-31.

⁴⁰ Progressive Policy Institute, *America at Risk: A Homeland Security Report Card* (Washington: Progressive Policy Institute, July 2003), 13.

And there is no national plan for how to communicate with individuals during a terrorist incident to advise them what to do.⁴¹

SECURITY RECOMMENDATION

The Administration should enhance its civil preparedness efforts by developing a coordinated and comprehensive campaign to inform the public of specific actions they should take in the event of a chemical, biological, radiological, or other weapon of mass destruction incident. The Administration should also support legislative initiatives to implement nationwide notification networks to ensure that all citizens have the information they need, and the actions they should take, following a terrorist attack

⁴¹ U.S. House, 108th Congress, 1st Session. *H.R. 2250, To amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to direct the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and implement the READICall emergency alert system*, GPO Access, Available: http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=108_cong_bills&docid=f:h2250ih.txt.pdf [February 19, 2004].

